

# Opinion: In wake of Capitol riot, heed the words of Martin Luther King Jr. - every day

SouthCoast faith leaders

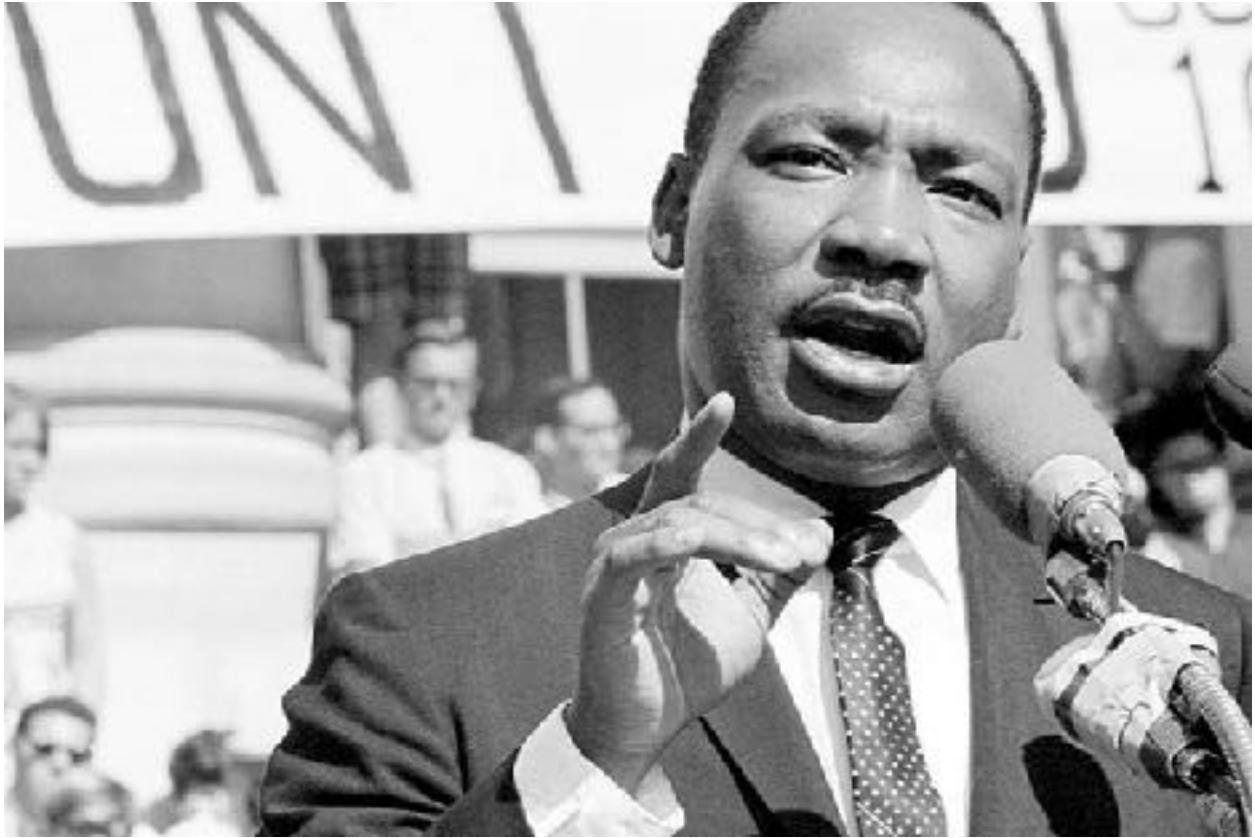
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*Members of the SouthCoast faith leaders community submitted this piece composed by local clergy to express a public, faith voice on the state of the country, particularly in light of the events of Jan. 6 and the import of this Martin Luther King Jr. weekend.*

As so many of us are still reeling from the spectacle of the shocking event that took place on Jan. 6 in our nation's capital – and its unfolding drama – it is easy to forget the annual observance of the national holiday honoring the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Many of our Southcoast faith communities typically honor King's life and legacy at this time of year, reflecting on Dr. King's vision through speeches, sermons, and group-study of King's writings. We sing anthems celebrating freedom, committing ourselves to the ideal of equality and of the oneness of humanity. All too quickly, however, we forget these moments of lofty commitments as we go about our daily routines.



This year we cannot allow ourselves to forget. Platitudes of unity and harmony ring hollow after the years of conspiracy-mongering, misrepresentations, lies and intentional stoking of divisions between Americans that led up to the assault on our democracy. Such incidents of rage and oppression were all too familiar to Dr. King and those with him, like the late Congressman John Lewis, as they strove for greater justice in America.

Now, more than ever, we need to heed the words of Dr. King, “Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.”

We stand at a significant moment as a nation when each person needs to decide whether their heart is with truth, compassion, and justice – or with indifference to lies and oppression. Persons in places of authority have promoted “alternative facts,” half-truths and downright lies as the “honest truth.” Too many people have been led to believe that “alternative facts” are a true reality.

Yet our scriptures warn us, “Do not bear false witness.” We have forgotten the Golden Rule which almost all faiths share: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” In this fraught era of our nation’s history, we would do well to heed Dr. King’s words: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

We are being challenged to work together in truth and openness. We cannot allow darkness and hatred to win. Dr. King reminds us, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” In his words, “Let no man pull you so low as to hate him.”

Now is the time for all of us to search our consciences, to turn from fear and hatred, to repent of “going along” with convenient deceptions and half-truths. Yet while it is important to hold accountable those who sow discord, we must remember King’s words: “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.” As hard as it may be, “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.”

This year let us try to remember Dr. King’s words beyond the celebration of his birthday. Let us defeat darkness with light, replace greed with generosity, oppression with justice. We do not pretend that this is an easy task: “There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right.”

Love demands we stand for what is right. To remain silent is to be complicit with the destruction of this great American experiment in democracy.

This Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, let us do what is right, honor our common humanity and truly honor the aspirational words of our Pledge of Allegiance which promises “liberty and justice for all,” regardless of our race, culture, national origin, beliefs, gender or personal persuasion. May God shed true grace on us all.

*Rev. Jim Hornsby, Rector Emeritus, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Fall River*

*Cantor Shoshana Brown, Temple Beth El, Fall River*  
*Martin Bentz, Outreach Coordinator, Islamic Society of Southeastern Massachusetts*  
*Pastor Charles Cloy, Senior Pastor, Bethel A.M.E. Church, New Bedford*  
*Pastor Robert Canavan, Christ The Rock Church, Fall River*  
*The Rev. Christopher R. Morck, Grace Episcopal Church, New Bedford*  
*Rev. David A. Lima, Inter-Church Council of Greater New Bedford*  
*Deborah Zane, Pastoral Associate, Catholic Community of Central Fall River*  
*Fr. John J. Oliveira, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, New Bedford*  
*Rev. Bette McClure, United Church of Christ clergy*  
*Reverend Paul H. Wheeler, Trinity Lutheran Church, Fairhaven*  
*Sister Marianna Sylvester, RSM, member, Our Lady of the Assumption Church, New Bedford*  
*Rabbi Raphael Kanter, Tifereth Israel Congregation, New Bedford*  
*Marian S. Margolies, member, First Christian Congregational Church, UCC, Swansea*  
*Helena DaSilva Hughes, Executive Director, Immigrants' Assistance Center, Inc.*  
*Rev. David Lupo, ssc. Pastor, St. Mary's Parish, Fairhaven*  
*Rev. Karen E. Gale, Pastor, First Christian Congregational Church, UCC, Swansea*  
*Ronny Kimball, member Unitarian Universalist Society of Fairhaven*  
*NAACP New Bedford Branch*  
*Pamela Terrien, Clerk of Peace and Social Justice Committee of Westport Monthly Meeting of Friends (Quakers)*  
*Bob Bailey, Bahá'í Community of Dartmouth*  
*Rev. Donald S. Mier, retired*  
*Odete Amarelo, St. Michael Parishioner & Educator, Fall River*  
*Cheryl Crossley-Simmons, member, First Christian Congregational Church, Swansea*  
*Jack Livramento, member, Our Lady of the Assumption Church, New Bedford*  
*Kathy Gallagher, Peace and Social Concerns, Allen's Neck Friends Meeting, Dartmouth*  
*Rev. Dr. Amy Lignitz Harken, minister, Mattapoisett Congregational Church, UCC*  
*The Rev. Susan Hagood Lee, Ph.D., Rector, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Fall River*  
*United Interfaith Action of Southeastern MA*  
*Trott Lee, LCSW, member, Christ The Rock: Assembly of God, Fall River*  
*The Rev. Melissa Howell, Curate, Grace Episcopal Church, New Bedford*  
*Rabbi Mark Elber, Temple Beth El, Fall River*  
*Rev. Darryl Malden, Pastor, Bethel A.M.E. Church, Fall River*  
*Father Richard Wilson, Pastor, Holy Family, East Taunton*  
*Reverend Kathleen Macedo, retired United Methodist Church pastor*  
*Rev. Ebenezer Oyebamiji, City of Joy Church, New Bedford*